





MACBETH – SHAKESPEARE'S PURPOSE IN WRITING...

How is Macbeth a product of its time?

- Superstitions
- Language
- King's absolute power
- Heresy , e.g speaking out against King
- Values
- Duels / battles



How is Macbeth relevant to us nowadays?

- Ambition can be detrimental if unchecked
 - The mind can deteriorate if you lose sleep
 - killing one can lead to the killing of many
 - Power corrupts
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Two main purposes in writing

1. To impress James I
2. To uphold Elizabethan values



1. To impress James I

- a. History - Shakespeare attempts to link Banquo to James I by drawing from an historical document (the actual document Macbeth was based on was the 'Holinshed Chronicles')
- The original Macbeth was not thought of as evil
- b. Witches – James I would have loved the fact that witches were considered both real and dangerous (he was very superstitious and was personally terrified of them)
- c. Gunpowder Plot – in 1604 a bunch of Catholic men tried to blow up James I & Houses of Parliament. They failed – Guido (Guy) Fawkes was tortured and executed
- James would have loved that Shakespeare made links between the king's murderers and evil. Shakespeare wrote this to make his audience think about what would happen if a king was murdered.

THE ACTUAL LIST – HERE WE GO...

Banquo

Fleance (married a daughter of the British Prince of Wales)

Walter Steward

Alane Steward

Alexander Steward

John Steward

Walter Steward

Robert II

Robert III

James I

James II

James III

James IV (married Margaret, daughter of Henry VII)

James V

Mary, Queen of Scots


James VI (Became James I of England in 1603)

2. To uphold Elizabethan values


- a. In the Elizabethan order of things, the universe is seen as a hierarchy with the king firmly at the top of the 'pyramid' (see diagram)
- b. The natural order of things is entirely corrupted when a king is killed (horses, owl and hawk, weather). This order is only restored once the king's murderer/s get their comeuppance
- c. Witches are considered evil – superstitious people were frowned upon

Strange Events occurring...

- Act 2.3 (53-60) – in the words of Lennox
- “**The night has been unruly**: where we lay, our **chimneys were blown down**, and, as they say, lamenting heard i’ th’ air, **strange screams of death**,
And prophesying with accents terrible of dire combustion and confused events
New hatched to th’ woeful time. **The obscure bird clamoured the livelong night**: some say, the **Earth was feverous and did shake.**”
- Act 2.4 (11 – 20) – Ross and The Old Man
- OLD MAN: “’Tis unnatural, and even like the deed that’s done. On Tuesday last a **falcon towering in her pride of place was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed**”
- ROSS: “And **Duncan’s horses** – a thing most strange and certain – beauteous and swift, the minions of their race, turned wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out, contending ‘gainst obedience, as they would make war with mankind”
- OLD MAN: “’Tis said they **eat each other**”





How would you answer this question?

- Identify what you consider to be the author's main purpose in producing a text you have studied
 - AND
 - Explore, in depth, one or two main techniques used to achieve it
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First part - identify

- Discuss purpose
 - Bring background knowledge of play and times into your essay
 - Try to imagine why this play is still relevant nowadays also, to take your argument even further
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Second part - techniques


- Very important in Level 2 English
 - Techniques are things such as: dialogue, characterisation, soliloquy, imagery, foreshadowing
 - You need to identify techniques, give examples and relate them to the purpose of the text
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Dialogue

- Macbeth's first lines in Act 1.3 "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" **echo the witches line "Fair is foul and foul is fair" in Act 1.1**
- This automatically links him with witches, who are evil... **It is a clever ploy on Shakespeare's part**
- Later dialogue "They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly" **in Act 5.7 echoes this**




Characterisation

- Witches (minor characters) help us understand Macbeth a bit more.
 - Banquo, Macduff, Duncan and Malcolm all act as character foils to Macbeth, to help us understand what he lacks in order to be a 'good', just character.
 - (you will need to discuss this in more depth – refer to future notes about minor characters)
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Soliloquy

- Macbeth's soliloquy's only occur in the first half of the play, before he consciously chooses an evil path when he chooses to seek out the witches' advice in 4.1
 - This lack of soliloquys is important because Shakespeare is no longer trying to create sympathy for him
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Imagery

- Evil
 - Sickness
 - Garments / robes
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Foreshadowing

- 1.6 (check this...) – we know Lady Macbeth has asked the evil spirits for help (= evil!) but we see her trying to sweet-talk Duncan- this knowledge creates sympathy for the king even more (think Duncan = James I)
 - Dialogue “So fair and foul a day I have not seen” also foreshadows what Macbeth will turn into
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